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# Kenya Birds

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## Editorial

How well do we know Kenya's birds? Pretty well, one would say, looking at the impressive publications describing their status and distribution: publications that are lacking for many other African countries. Not very well at all, the results of last October's World Birdwatch suggest. A side-product of the event has been a large number of new records for the Bird Atlas of Kenya — no fewer than 228, including many for areas that one would have assumed were well-watched and well-known. These are published in a bumper Records and Notes section in this issue. Not that we have accepted all records, by any means: Dennie Angwin and then Joseph Oyugi have undertaken the onerous task of screening lists and, where necessary, obtaining further details from the observers. The records published here are only those that we have managed to confirm.

This issue we focus on birds of highland forests, especially those close to Nairobi. There is also a flavour of rehabilitation, with articles on this process in an eagle, a buzzard and a crow, and on captive breeding. This is all something of a pause to catch breath as we gear up for a special issue on the Maasai Mara in vol. 3(2). As ever, appropriate contributions and artwork will be welcomed with open arms, especially if received before the end of September 1994. Good birding!

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Front cover illustration: Ayre's Hawk Eagle *Hieraaetus dubius* from a vignette by Simon Thomsett. Typesetting and layout by BirdLife Kenya.

# News from Kenya and abroad

## Department of Ornithology

**Nairobi Ringing Group kicks off**

VSO volunteer Colin Jackson joined the Department at the beginning of June as a Records and Training Officer. Colin is an experienced ringing trainer, having worked for several years at the A Rocha bird observatory in Portugal. One of his first tasks is to begin a Nairobi Ringing Group that will offer appropriate training to Department staff and interested amateurs, as well as collecting useful long-term data on Nairobi birds. The group has already started work in the Museum grounds, which hold a surprising number of birds — they have caught particular quantities of Holub's Golden Weavers, which pack a nasty bite for the beginner. Initial funding for this initiative is coming from BirdLife Kenya and the Kenya Museum Society.

**Crane studies diversify**

Research Associate Christa Budde, a student from Germany, is presently based at the Saiwa Research Station collecting data on visual and vocal communication in cranes for her PhD. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Daut of Cornell University visited Saiwa with James Wachira of the Department to collect blood samples for her work on crane herpes virus. A number of cranes were trapped and ringed, and samples taken.

Meanwhile, the Kenya Museum Society has given the Department a grant to continue work at and around Lake Ol'Bolossat, an important wetland that has been the subject of recent land disputes (see *Kenya Birds* 2(1):7). The project will be coordinated by Cecilia Gichuki, who will be working with local communities as well as collecting data on the birds of the lake. Nathan Gichohi, a Wildlife Management graduate from Moi University, will be joining the project on a part-time basis.

Cecilia and James Wachira visited Ol'Bolossat from 6–8 May, and also made a survey trip to a large wetland near Rumuruti. This is a large papyrus swamp, but unfortunately the edges have been settled and much vegetation destroyed. A more detailed survey may be attempted in the near future.

**Taita Hills survey**

Iain Illingworth, from the RSPB in Scotland, visited Kenya during April and May 1994 to take part in the Kaya Project (see below). On 19–21 April, Department staff members James Wachira and Kuria Ndung'u joined him for a brief survey of

Grey Crowned Crane
— *Anik Scannel*

the Taita Hills forests (Mbololo and Ngangao), to assess their current status. A report is awaited.

**PFund donates vehicle**

The Peregrine Fund, through Simon Thomsett, has generously donated a Suzuki 4WD, KUN 496, to the Department. This vehicle has up to now been used for the Sokoke Scops Owl project. It should substantially boost the Department's ability to carry out field work, especially on birds of prey.

**Other news**

George Amutete began his fieldwork on Luhyia ethno-ornithology in April and May with visits to Kakamega, Bungoma, Mt Elgon and Webuye areas (see below). This work is being supported by the Kenya Museum Society.

Luc Lens, from the University of Antwerp in Belgium, is to join the Department from September 1994 under the VVOB scheme of the Belgian government, which provides personnel support for institutions in Kenya. Luc recently completed his PhD on cooperative breeding in Crested Tits, and his arrival will be a major boost to the Department's ecological research programme.

**Hinde's Babbler surveys continue**

From 7–11 March 1994, Department of Ornithology staff members Oliver Nasirwa, Patrick Gichuki and Kuria Ndung'u and MSc. student Peter Njoroge carried out an exploratory survey at Mukurweini, Nyeri District. The purpose of the survey was to assess the population status and distribution of the little-known Hinde's Babbler, which was recently discovered in this area (see *Kenya Birds* 2(2): 3). The survey covered an area of 27 $km^2$. Using tape-recorded vocalisations the team managed to find 23 groups with a total of 87 individuals of this threatened species.

Between 30 May and 3 June 1994 a similar survey was carried out in Muvuti Location of Machakos District, this time by Njoroge with Ornithology staff members Joseph Oyugi and James Wachira. The initial survey covered an area of 28 $km^2$ but was later extended into an additional 14 $km^2$ in the neighbouring Kathekakai Farmers' Society (formerly Potha Ranch), where the birds had been

sighted in 1983 by A. D. Lewis. The terrain is less steep than in the Central Province sites, but following the river valleys was difficult going, with thick sand, piles of boulders and extremely thorny vegetation.

Within Muvuti Location, we found only three pairs (no larger groups), along the banks of the Ikiwe River. Searches for more groups along the river's numerous tributaries were unsuccessful. At Potha Ranch we found one pair and seven larger groups, totalling 30 individuals, along the banks of the dry Mwania River. Further searches of its tributaries were unsuccessful but more groups probably exist upstream from our section of the Mwania River, which eventually flows into the Ikiwe River system.

The birds in Machakos use a different habitat from those in Mukurweini or Kianyaga. The area is mainly covered by open *Acacia* woodland but there is dense vegetation bordering the rivers, which is where the babblers live. Where the rivers held water the riverine vegetation was lush and green. The area is sparsely cultivated because of its dry climate. Coffee plantations and *Lantana* thickets, the babblers' feeding and breeding grounds in Kianyaga and Mukurweini, were absent.

Compared with the other two sites the Machakos babblers occurred at a much lower density. However, in this area they do not seem to be immediately threatened by agricultural development. Though the people in the region eat birds, the habit is not a major threat to the babblers since the human population density is still relatively low.

During the Machakos survey we encountered only one group of the Northern Pied Babblers. This species is abundant in Kianyaga, but the results of the recently concluded research in Kianyaga indicate that the Hinde's Babbler is not being outcompeted by its commoner relative. Though the two species overlap considerably in home range and spend similar proportions of their day performing particular activities, they spend different amounts of time in particular habitats. The Hinde's Babbler shows a consistent preference for coffee and food-crop farms for feeding and retreats to *Lantana* patches for cover. Unlike the Hinde's Babbler, the Northern Pied Babbler is not confined only to the valleys but extends its range beyond them into areas close to human habitation. Where the two species both occur in the same valley the Hinde's Babbler occupies the lower slopes while the Northern Pied Babbler spends most of its time in the upper parts. Disputes were occasionally observed between the two species, but these were always won by the Hinde's.

A survey of community attitudes in Kianyaga showed that most people like birds. The reasons they gave for their feelings included the birds' beauty, ecological role, usefulness as indicators of seasonal change, attraction for tourists and moral right to live. A large number of the community eat birds or used to eat

them when young. The habit is widespread in the area since all who were interviewed could tell of people they knew who eat birds in the region. The babblers featured prominently in the list of birds given as the favourites. Others included doves, pigeons, spurfowls, seed-eaters, weavers, sunbirds and the Common Bulbul.

All the people interviewed knew the babbler group of birds but few could differentiate between the Hinde's and the Northern Pied Babblers. A large part of the community would not mind if the babblers foraged in their farms as long as they did not destroy their crops. Despite this, few of them were willing to leave their *Lantana* patches uncleared for the sake of the babblers. Most of the *Lantana* patches were readily accessible to man. As a result they are likely to be cleared in the near future to create room for cultivation — a move that is likely to be disastrous for the babblers. — *Peter Njoroge, Dept. Ornithology, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

**Kaya project kicks off**

On 28 April 1994 Ornithology staff Edward Waiyaki, Patrick Gichuki and Kuria wa Ndung'u began fieldwork surveying birds in coastal forests in Kwale District. The project, which will continue until the end of August 1994, is part of Waiyaki's MSc programme at the University of Kent in the UK. Funding comes from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Programme.

East Africa's coastal forest belt is rich in biodiversity and holds many endemic species of plants and animals; it has been identified as an Endemic Bird Area in a recent study by BirdLife International. However the belt is not continuous but fragmented, consisting of a mosaic of scattered forest patches. In Kenya, at least 67 coastal forest patches exist, many of them very small. Most of these patches are ka*yas*, a Mijikenda name meaning 'sacred home'. The sacred nature of these forests, and their important place in traditional beliefs, has aided their conservation. Unfortunately, such beliefs are lessening in strength and many forests are under threat. Despite their biodiversity potential and interesting cultural history, practically no ornithological work has been conducted on them.

The Kaya project hopes to fill that gap in knowledge. The project has two main aims: to document the avifauna of the forests and to examine the effects of forest fragmentation, structure, isolation and moisture on the distribution of bird communities. It also forms the start of what should be a much larger project which hopes to document the Important Bird Areas of Kenya.

So far the project has covered four patches out of the intended 12–15. These are Kaya Kinondo. Kaya Muhaka and Gongoni and Dzombo Forest Reserves. We have had both interesting and disappointing experiences during this time. The

coastal region received the highest amount of rainfall in the whole country during the month of May, and most of it seemed to fall on the survey team. We experienced rough times, especially in Gongoni forest reserve where it rained throughout the whole study period. Dzombo soils proved that their nasty reputation is justified when our Landrover got stuck for 24 hours. It took two tractors and a hired team of eight people ten hours work to extract it.

However, interesting records have been made, the most notable being the netting of an African Pitta in Kaya Kinondo, a coral rag forest about 10 km from Diani shopping centre. As far as we can tell, this species was last recorded in Kenya about a decade ago and this record pinpoints an additional site. Another species of interest was the threatened Sokoke Pipit which was recorded on the lower parts of Dzombo.

In the next phase of the project the team will look at other notable Kwale forests such as Mrima, Marenji and Buda — *Edward Waiyaki, Dept. Ornithology, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

**Ethno-ornithology for conservation: the case of the Luhyia**

This project began in April 1994 with support from the Kenya Museum Society. It involves documenting the traditional beliefs, folklore, values and uses made of birds by the Luhyia community of Kenya's Western Province. Traditional practices and conservation ethics, which were in harmony with environmental conservation, are now rapidly disappearing and are no longer part of the fabric of peoples' lives. This project aims not only to record the cultural significance of birds but to pass on this knowledge, together with information on their modern values and importance, to the youth in some selected schools in Western Province.

Many interesting findings are being made from the four districts involved — Kakamega, Vihiga, Bungoma and Busia. An example is the strange case of the Black Crake *Limnocorax flavirostra*. This bird, called *Efutubili* in Luhyia, is seldom observed. However when seen this shy bird stirs mixed feelings in the observer if he knows the beliefs attached to it. So important is the bird that an old man who knows its value is more than willing to exchange a bull for it!

The Bukusu people of Bungoma district believe that it is a great achievement to sight the eggs of E*futubili*, something only a few have managed to do. Seeing the eggs ensures good luck; and if the luck does not manifest in your own life, it will do so in your offspring. The densely vegetated wetland areas that the bird inhabits are respected places, more so if they are close to human habitation. The bird protects human beings and their property indirectly, since *Efutubili* is believed to repel lightning strike. The magic for this impressive feat is believed to be concentrated in the beak and legs of the live bird, which are respectively bright

green and pink in colour. In a dead *Efutubili*, however, this powerful magic disperses throughout the whole body.

It is believed that lightning strike can be controlled and sent by powerful witch doctors. Using this very strong belief, some crafty Luhyias do mischief to others. Lightning can be prescribed and directed to strike an individual or property in a targeted homestead. The architect of this catastrophe may be propelled into action because of some wrong done to him by the victim or by his malicious or covetous mind. So real is this danger to some that they attempt to immunise themselves and their offspring against it. In search for this immunity they travel far and wide, sometimes, it is said, as far as the Coast. The immunity is conferred via a vaccination. Parallel incisions are made using a sharp knife or razor blade. This is done on a part of the body that is hidden, most often on the back or on the stomach and in some cases on the neck. As fresh blood oozes out so the witch doctor adeptly presses in the vaccine. The vaccine consists of fine ash obtained from the burnt body of *Efutubili*. This guarantees immunity not only to thunder strike but also to all other forms of witchcraft directed against an individual. — *George Amutete, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

**Gamebird research: Eat ' em to save ' em?**

"The best way to conserve wildlife is to eat it" , says David Hopcraft. This presumably applies to birds too, although I am not sure that is goes down the throat well with bird lovers.

'Eating', or 'consumptive utilisation' of wildlife (in more technical terms) is fast becoming the fashionable strategy in wildlife management. And for good reason. The keepers of any wildlife species must have a convincing justification, usually an economic one, for maintaining the species on their piece of land.

This is a strategy that must be considered to conserve certain species of birds too. These are the gamebirds (family Phasianidae, the quails and francolins, and family Numididae, the guineafowl), a group that supposedly have small brains but very tasty meat. These have been exterminated over large areas of their previous distribution due to hunting pressure and habitat destruction.

Since March 1993 a study to establish a monitoring system for gamebirds has been going on. The focus initially was on one species, the Yellow-necked Spurfowl, in order to test appropriate methods. In November 1993 the study was extended to Imbirikani Group ranch in Kajiado District where there are large numbers of these birds.

The Maasai people, the main inhabitants of this district, do not eat birds (or eggs). The main threat comes from habitat destruction. So as for everything else, there must be an economic reason for any effort to be directed towards conserving the habitat that gamebirds — and many other wildlife species — depend on.

Gamebird hunting has been going on for a long time, having been reintroduced in 1984 after the general hunting ban in 1977. If properly managed, this industry has the potential to provide a significant revenue to communities in rural areas, and thus an incentive for habitat conservation. The gamebird study has therefore been examining the hunting industry, its economics and the biology of these birds. Currently, a new hunting management system is being tested in Imbirikani. If successful, it may be replicated in other group ranches.

Our knowledge about East African gamebirds is still very incomplete. One objective of this study is to train field assistants in data collection. Data collected by them can be analysed to provide continuous feedback on the densities of gamebirds and habitat condition in various parts of Kajiado district. This will allow sustainable levels of shooting to be set.

"But they are so many!", said a Maasai herdsboy one day, when I told him I was counting enkurl*ee* or Yellow-necked Spurfowl. Well, "once there were so many rhino and elephant..." the story goes. It wouldn't take very long for this to be "once there was a group of very tasty birds called gamebirds".

I hope by this study to help enable his grandchildren not only to 'eat' gamebirds but also to see them, and the other plants and animals they live with, in the abundance that they occur in Kajiado District today. — Alfred *Simiyu, Department of Ornithology, P O Box 40658, Nairobi*

**First breeding record for Sokoke Scops Owl**

In April this year, the first ever juvenile Sokoke Scops Owl *Otus ireneae* was recorded from the Arabuko-Sokoke forest along the Kenyan coast. The juvenile owl (along with its parents) was caught and ringed in the northern *Cynometra* woodland habitat near Jilore Forest Station. Weighing 44.5 grams, the grey-phased juvenile (nicknamed 'JJ') closely resembled its parents in size and was judged to be approximately six to eight weeks old. Closer comparison with its parents showed that although the juvenile was full-plumaged, its facial disc was brown with a much greater concentration of rictal bristles. It also differed in having a dark yellow iris and greenish-grey feet as compared to its parents' pale yellow iris and pink feet. An extraordinary feature of the juvenile was its call, which can be described as a soft elongated trill, or a softer, slow-motion version of the call of an African Scops Owl Otus *senegalensis*. This is in sharp contrast to the monotonous series of single whistles made by the adults. Both parents and the juvenile were seen during the day, roosting together four metres above the ground on a vine among the dense foliage of the Cyno*metra* woodland.

The trapping of the juvenile owl, plus its parents, brings to nine the total number of owls caught and ringed during the Sokoke Scops Owl Project. New and interesting data have been collected during the ten-month study which looked

at the owl's distribution pattern, population size, feeding ecology and a habitat conservation plan to ensure the endangered bird's survival. — *Munir Virani, Sokoke Scops Owl Project, P O Box 45111, Nairobi.*

## BirdLife Kenya

BirdLife Kenya, through its parent body, the East Africa Natural History Society, should soon become the BirdLife International partner in Kenya. Negotiations have been concluded and it is hoped to sign a Memorandum of Agreement during the BirdLife World Conference at Rosenheim, Germany this August. Michael Rands (BirdLife International Deputy Director) and John Fanshawe (Programme Development Manager) met with BirdLife Kenya in June and held discussions about the group's development and plans for the future.

Meanwhile, BirdLife Kenya is giving support to the new Nairobi Ringing Group, which will be training Kenyan ornithologists and birders in this important but difficult technique. The Committee has also given a bridging grant to Edward Waiyaki to cover the immediate costs of his fieldwork in Kwale (see this issue). The group is also sponsoring an exhibition of bird art by three Kenyan artists, Kioko Mwitiki, Steve Njenga and Dinesh Rivanka, from 15–24 July (see Events and Announcements). This follows on from Kioko's very successful exhibit of bird sculpture last year.

By the time this issue goes to press, the BirdLife Kenya secretariat should have moved to its new base in the refurbished EANHS office. This will provide a convenient home for the secretariat while at the same time relieving some of the burden on the Department of Ornithology, which has housed BirdLife Kenya for the last four years.

## Kenya Wetlands Working Group

The Kenya Wetlands Working Group produces its own newsletter, *Wetland News*. If you would like to receive this, please write to: the Secretary, Kenya Wetlands Working Group, P O Box 40658, Nairobi. This section only highlights KWWG news related to birds.

The Convention on Migratory Species of Animals, more popularly called the Bonn Convention, held a meeting of parties and range states in Nairobi at the beginning of June. Several members of the KWWG Committee attended the initial scientific seminar, and the closing days of discussion on the Africa-Eurasia Migratory Waterfowl Agreement. A poster was displayed on migratory waterbirds in Kenya, based mainly on the results of the KWWG waterbird counts that have taken place annually since 1991. Using a recent IWRB publication, *Waterfowl*

*Population Estimates*, it was possible to pinpoint a number of sites that hold more than 1% of the biogeographic population of particular waterbird species. Such sites would qualify for listing as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on this criterion alone. It is hoped to develop this analysis further to help produce a list of candidate Ramsar sites. Such sites would also qualify as Important Bird Areas under the , criteria being developed by BirdLife International.

The 1994 July waterbird count at Lake Nakuru is scheduled for 16–17 July. This year for the first time an aerial survey will take place simultaneously. The purpose of the survey is not to attempt a precise count of Nakuru, but to look at the distribution of flamingos over the lakes of the rift valley in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. This 'snapshot' view should give a much better picture of the overall population size. The Global Environment Facility Regional Biodiversity Project is funding the aerial survey (in Kenya, through the National Environment Secretariat Wetlands Programme).

## International

**Major environmental award for BirdLife**

BirdLife Kenya wishes to congratulate BirdLife International for winning the prestigious Amsterdam Prize for the Environment in 1994. This prize, worth Dfl 250,000 (£90,000), was made available by the Alfred Heineken Fondsen Foundation and awarded to BirdLife by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. The prize aims to promote scientific research in environmental issues and was won by BirdLife in recognition of its contribution to global biodiversity conservation.

BirdLife's programme of identifying Important Bird Areas and its analysis of globally threatened species has put the organisation in a unique place among other international NGOs. The publication of the authoritative book P*utting Biodiversity on the Map* by Colin Bibby and other research scientists at the Secretariat in Cambridge, UK, prompted the jury to choose the BirdLife family for the prize. The award will be received, on behalf BirdLife International, by Colin Bibby, the Conservation Director, at a ceremony of the Academy on 30 September this year. BirdLife Kenya is proud to have been associated with the successful research on global biodiversity conservation and with this commendation. — *Nathan Gichuki, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

# Bird Family Profiles
## 5: Trogons

Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

Trogons are among the most beautiful and fascinating of birds. With their long tails and glowing colours they look like the archetypal 'exotic tropical bird' of popular imagination. Indeed, trogons are almost exclusively tropical in distribution, confined to the lower latitudes of America, Africa and Asia. Some 35 to 40 modern species are recognised. The bulk of these occur in the Neotropics, with around five genera and over twenty species; Asia has eleven species and Africa just three. The American species include the Resplendent Quetzal, Pha*romachrus mocinno*, sacred to the ancient Aztecs and Mayas; a magnificent bird indeed with its hugely elongated upper tail coverts.

All trogons have a similar general 'design'. They are long-tailed, large-headed, large-eyed birds with short necks and legs and soft, dense colourful plumage. Adult males have the lower breast and abdomen bright pink, red, orange or yellow, contrasting (in the African and American species) with brilliant metallic green or blue upperparts. The Asian species tend to lack the metallic colour. Female trogons are generally duller than the males, but often also have some bright colour on the lower underparts. The bill, which is often colourful too, is short, very broad, and slightly hooked. It is surrounded by stiff rictal bristles that protect the bird's eyes from its insect prey.

Two species of trogon are found in Kenya: Narina's Trogon A*paloderma narina* and the Bar-tailed Trogon *A. vittatum*. The two species look very similar but are easily distinguished by the markings on the underside of the tail, which is finely barred in the Bar-tailed Trogon and white in Narina's.

Of the two, Narina's Trogon is far more widespread and common, occurring from the coast (race l*ittoralis*) to the highlands up to 3000 m (race *narina*). It prefers forest but can also be found in dense riverine woodland, and sometimes in quite thickety habitats where it hunts surprisingly close to the ground. The Bar-tailed Trogon is a bird of true forest, usually at high altitudes. It tends to keep more to the canopy than Narina's, rarely descending below 8 m from the ground. Where both species are found together, Narina's tends to be found in edge and secondary habitats, and the Bar-tailed in taller, denser forest.

Little is known about the lives of African trogons. There is even some dispute whether Narina's Trogon is migratory or not; however, fluctuations in the number, of birds seen in Nairobi forests suggest that at least altitudinal movements occur. The birds' large eyes and broad bills are adaptations to their way of life as insect

catchers in dense, shaded forests. They are most likely to be seen perched motionless, slightly hunched, with their back to you, suddenly taking flight to catch an insect in mid-air or pluck a caterpillar off a twig. Despite their bright colours they can be extremely hard to see when perched.

Trogons appear to be very territorial, and one of the best ways to locate either of the Kenyan species is by listening for their calls. Narina's makes a distinctive, mournful series of double whistles, which has been described as a 'weary, two-note sigh of depression': C*OO-coo, COO-coo, COO-coo*..... As he calls, the male moves his tail slightly backwards and forwards, and this movement can give away his position. The Bar-tailed Trogon's call is a little different, a fairly fast and high-pitched *wup-wup-wup-wup-wup-wup*..., each series lasting five to ten seconds. It also has a loud descending ringing call, c*heo-oo*, apparently made by the female during courtship.

One of the best places to see Narina's Trogon is in the forests around Nairobi; they seem to be especially abundant at times in the Ngong Road Forest. Gatamayu and Kieni Forests (see article in this issue) are good sites for the Bar-tailed. Tracking them down can take time and persistence, but to the dedicated trogon-watcher this adds it own allure. Patience has its rewards: there is nothing quite like the sight of a trogon silently blazing red and green through the dark forest foliage.

## Birding in... Kieni and Gatamayu Forests

Yvonne Malcolm-Coe, P O Box 48504, Nairobi

The uniqueness of Kenya lies in its great diversity of scenery, habitats and wildlife. Travel out of Nairobi in a south-westerly direction for a little over an hour and you are in a semi-arid zone of acacia, *Commiphora* and scrub. Then travel for one or two hours in a north-westerly direction from the city and you are in a higher altitude zone of indigenous forests, conifer plantations and tea estates.

Kieni and Gatamayu are 'islands' of indigenous forest surrounded by the cultivation. Few birds dwell in these cultivated areas, but the 'islands' are richly rewarding in the numbers of bird species which are there. One has to be patient and persevering when forest birdwatching: sometimes nothing is going on, but then one feeding party after another will fly through and you must be quick off the mark to catch them all. Much craning of the neck is involved when peering up into the canopy, or knee-bending when searching the understorey, and it is down on hands and knees for the undergrowth!

**Getting there**

Kieni Forest can be reached by two routes. The first takes you along the Nairobi/Thika road, turning left towards Mangu just before the A3 Garissa junction and proceeding for 46 km on a tarmac road. A track on the right-hand side of the road leads into the forest, as does another to the left a further 10 km on. The second route to Kieni is via the Limuru/Naivasha road, turning left onto the flyover just before one begins to descend the escarpment, and thence onto the road to Thika, reversing the directions coming from there.

Gatamayu Forest, at an altitude of 2200 m, has similar forest vegetation and bird species, but is much more accessible and convenient to visit. Take the Uplands road to Naivasha and turn left 14 km from Limuru (on the right you will see the rounded hill covered with indigenous forest) and go down under the main road. Then turn right at the T-junction signposted for Kerita Forest Station. Bear left (don't take the dirt road straight ahead) and follow this road for 3 km, skirting below the forest station and adjacent village. After another 7 km the road drops down a steep hill to cross the Gatamayu river, then climbs up to the village. Turn left on the brow of the hill to follow a track between village fences to the forest. The road from the main road turn-off is tarmacked up to the tea-growing area and, thereafter, the last stretch of three and a half kilometres is on a reasonable dirt road — except when it has rained heavily, when it can prove to be quite a sporting driving experience!

It is all well worthwhile when you reach the forest and see and hear the birds. There is a spacious campsite, fenced off against grazing cattle and marauding elephants, and also a small building containing the Forestry Office and four small rooms which visitors can use — convenient when it is wet. To stay in this beautiful area costs only KSh. 50/- per person per night.

**Kieni Forest**

Kieni contains many unusual and interesting birds. Just a few of the many species which can be seen along the forest tracks are the Bar-tailed Trogon, Black-throated Apalis, Doherty's Bush Shrike (giving its clear bell- and flute-like calls), Sharpe's Starling and Waller's Chestnut-winged Starling. Others species of great interest recorded here, but harder to find, include Abbott's Starling, the Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo (its call is a little like a Red-chested Cuckoo in an angry fit, becoming more and more worked up as it goes along), the rarely-seen Orange Ground Thrush and, at its easternmost extremity of range, the Red-chested Owlet. The owlet's call is a single ghostly whistle, often repeated, frequently heard just before dawn.

**Gatamayu Forest**

The forest contains many different trees and shrubs, among them two species of *Podocarpus*, *Garcinia*, wild banana, bamboo and magnificent trees ferns, and also head-high stinging-nettle vegetation. Beware, they are *kali sana*, as are also the nasty biting black flies which appear at times.

During last October's World Birdwatch I took my team to Gatamayu on the Sunday for a little respite from the lower, drier and hotter areas. Even up there it was hot and dry and we recorded only 30 species — the usual regulars. However, at other times of the year it can be much more lively and many species can be seen. March is a good month to visit as the forest is still in quite good condition and full of Blackcaps singing away prior to departure. The trees are fruiting and many of the large fruit-eaters are present. Excellent birding can be done in and around the campsite itself without having to move very far. Scaly Francolins forage round the edge just like domestic fowl, the usually skulking Cinnamon Bracken Warbler alights on the grass to feed, and the shy Lemon Dove and vocal Rüppell's Robin Chat feed on the ground outside the fence. At the very top of a tree can be heard the telephone-like trill of the Chestnut-throated Apalis — difficult to spot unless it comes down lower to feed. Mid-strata is the height for the Grey Apalis giving its rather monotonous *chip-it* call, while lower down in the dense shrubbery is the Black-collared Apalis, more often heard than seen, with a somewhat harsh and unmelodious call. In the tops of the fruiting trees are the Olive Pigeons wing-flapping noisily and uttering their rolling cooing calls; also the Red-fronted Parrots squawking typically, Hartlaub's Turaco, Silvery-cheeked and Crowned Hornbills and, occasionally, flocks of Kenrick's Starlings. The rolling/drumming sound of the Fine-banded Woodpecker is heard and it can often be seen on a tree in the campsite. Listen for the soft four-note call of the charming little White-starred Forest Robin. Usually a shy and skulking bird, it is observed quite readily at breeding time when there is more feeding activity. Even the young birds are very pretty with their spotted and mottled black and golden plumage. When foraging down by the river this bird utters a louder one note call which, amazingly, can be heard even above the sound of the water.

Away from the campsite one can either drive or, preferably walk along a wide track, where many birds can be seen at all levels of the forest. On a good day the Bronze-naped Pigeon, Emerald Cuckoo, Bar-tailed Trogon, both Black-headed and Montane Orioles are all there. Also a quartet of greenbuls — Slender-billed, Yellow-whiskered, Mountain and Placid. If you are really lucky, the Brown-chested Alethe will appear on the track. A sustained musical song higher up in the trees reveals the presence of the small Brown Woodland Warbler — a fine songster. From deep in the undergrowth comes a rapid sound like someone sharpening a knife: this is the Evergreen Forest Warbler, the dense forest

replacement of the Cinnamon Bracken Warbler. You may suddenly be startled by an outburst of melodious song coming from quite nearby in the lower shrubs; look for the African Hill Babbler, another good singer. In this higher altitude forest are also the Mountain Yellow Warbler, White-browed Crombec, Black-throated Wattle-eye and Grey-headed Negrofinch. A special bonus is to hear and see the White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, fluttering daintily from perch to perch and constantly fanning its tail, all the while uttering its tinkling little song. This species often feeds at a low level. A rarely sighted and endangered species is the Abbott's Starling which, when seen, is perched motionless and silent on a branch. Several species of sunbirds are present, but the notable one is the Olive Sunbird. This bird of dense forest has a somewhat drab appearance but a fine warbling song and clear tuneful call notes. It has the distinction of being listed among the world's 200 best singers (along with six others mentioned in this write-up) in a study carried out over 20 years ago on the subject of birdsong.

Tracks leading off to the left of the main one descent quite steeply down to the Gatamayu River where can be seen the African Black Duck, Grey and Mountain Wagtails. The 'plum' bird to be seen down here, and sometimes higher up, is the strikingly beautiful Many-coloured Bush Shrike. It forages either high up in vine-type vegetation on the tree, or low down in shrubs. Its call is as distinctive as its colourful plumage: a lovely set of clear flute-like notes. It also has a less appealing, grating rasping call. Paths lead along the river on both sides, and they are well worth exploring as there are scenic waterfalls and interesting vegetation.

Birds of prey which can be seen in the forest or flying overhead are the African Goshawk, Mountain Buzzard, Ayres' Hawk Eagle and Crowned Eagle. If the rising and falling musical call of the Crowned Eagle is heard, note if it is coming from high up or low down — if high up it is the eagle, if low down is the clever imitation being given by the Rüppell's Robin Chat!

Back again in the campsite as night-time approaches the Montane Nightjar emerges. If it is a moonlit night one can hear the bird calling, a lovely liquid *pi-yu, pi-wiuuuuu*. On a rainy night, if the winged termites are rising, it can be seen hawking to and fro. Later on the call of the African Wood Owl is heard and also the loud cries of the Greater Galago. In the early hours of the morning the rolling croaking calls of the Black and White Colobus Monkeys sound out. With the bellowing and trumpeting of visiting elephants added to this, one can experience an interesting and vocal night.

These forest 'islands' are beautiful and challenging, and greatly worthy of being protected and preserved for continued enjoyment.

**Acknowledgements**
Thanks to Anne Birnie for information on Gatamayu trees.

# Records and Notes

Compiled by Joseph Oyugi and Leon Bennun

This section exists for the rapid publication of interesting observations, and contributions are welcomed.

If you are sending in records to **Kenya Birds**, please consider the following guidelines. For **breeding records**, send in cases of CONFIRMED breeding, i.e. birds incubating eggs or feeding nestlings/fledglings. Records of confirmed breeding are useful for ALL species, even the most common ones; records of nest-building, courtship etc. are only needed for rare species or ones where there are few breeding records. You are strongly urged to fill in nest-record card at the same time. Much more detail can be recorded on a card, and if your record can be added to the card collection then it is of permanent value. Cards can be obtained free of charge from the EANHS Nest Record Scheme Organiser (see back page). A report listing records submitted to the scheme is published every second year in the Annual Bird Report of Scopus.

For other records of Afr**otropical/oceanic** birds and **Palaearctic** birds, please send in any sightings and notes that you think are of interest. The Editors will select records for publication according to the space available. For **all** records, including breeding records, please be as precise as possible about **dates** and **locations**. If you have sighting for from places not easily found on the map, please take the trouble to give the latitude and longitude to as much precision as you can (preferable the nearest second of arc or better). This will allow us to use this records when we begin, very soon, to update and refine the present Bird Atlas of Kenya by computerising bird distribution records.

Supporting details are always welcomed for unusual records and will improve the chances of publication. Records of certain species are requested for inclusion in the Scopus Annual Bird Report (the third issue of Scopus each year). These should be sent to Don Turner (P O Box 48019, Nairobi), who can also supply information on which records are required. For particularly unusual sightings supporting details (i.e. field notes, photographs etc.) will be needed for scrutiny by the OS-C Rarities Committee.

**Key to records**

New atlas square are indicated in square brackets. Codes are: **pres**, present (first record); **post pres**, present (first post-1970 record); **prob**, probable breeding; **conf**, confirmed breeding; **post conf**, confirmed breeding (first since 1970); e.g. [**pres, conf 25B**] indicates that the species is present and confirmed as breeding in square 25B.

Where scientific names are not stated here (and elsewhere in Kenya Birds) the English names follow Britton (ed.) 1980 Birds of East Africa.

## Breeding records

**Great Sparrowhawk:** One sub-adult flushed from the nest, Ololua Forest 8/2/94 JOO. ON, KN, PG & GA. **Common Moorhen:** Adult and two young. Nairobi NP 5/6/94 JO & YMC. **Blacksmith Plover:** Pair with three new-hatched chicks. Nairobi NP 5/6/94

YMC. **Crowned Plover:** Pair with three downy young, a quarter adult size, Nairobi NP 29/5/94. **Purple Gallinule:** Pair plus half-grown young, Hyena Dam, Nairobi NP, 8/5/94 AHe, JHe & MV. **White-browed Coucal [conf 76C]:** Carrying food and repeatedly entering reeds at same spot, Machakos 12/5/94 CJ. **Sokoke Scops Owl [conf 102B]:** Both parents and juvenile roosting together on a vine close to *Cynometra* tree, juvenile downy grey, Sokoke Forest 17/4/94 MV. **Drongo:** Pair with two chicks in nest; nest fell during heavy rain, Shanzu, Mombasa 5/94 YMC. **White-starred Forest Robin:** One fledgling young being fed by both adults, Ololua Forest 10/2/94 ON & KN; several adults feeding young, Gatamayu Forest 3/94 YMC. **Northern Olive Thrush:** Adult incubating, Ololua Forest 8/2/94 ON, JOO & KN. **Siffling Cisticola:** Adult and one young, Nairobi NP 5/6/94 JO & YMC. **Paradise Flycatcher:** Pair sitting, Thika 5/94, feeding two young 10/6/94 MJ. **Plain-backed Pipit [conf 76C]:** A nest with three young, Machakos 18–26/5/94 CJ. **Wattled Starling:** Building and displaying in small tree near Masai Lodge gate, Nairobi NP 15/5/94 FN. **Red-billed Firefinch [conf 76C]:** Two juveniles begging food from an adult, Machakos 28/5/94 CJ.

## Other records: Afrotropical species

**Ostrich [pres 62A]:** Lake Nakuru NP 9–10/10/93 IM, HM & AMK. **Long-tailed Cormorant [pres 52C]:** Meru National Park 9–10/10/93 TG, PG & RT. **Darter [pres 89A]:** Cottars Camp, Tsavo 29/3/91 NW. **Goliath Heron [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/94 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MM1, NG & MT; **[pres 76C]:** One along River Ikiwe, Machakos 2/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **Purple Heron [pres 114B]:** Mombasa 9–10/10/93 MR, ML1, NR1, PR, WW, IC & RM; **[pres 63A]:** Kianyaga 9–10/10/93 PN, PGG & DM. **Madagascar Squacco Heron:** Ormanyi Dam, Nairobi NP 5/6/94 JO & YMC. **Marabou Stork [pres 102D]:** Bamburi, Mombasa 23/12/91 NW. **Hadada [pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **African Spoonbill [pres 76A]:** Thika 9–10/10/93 JP, TP, MH, PH1, AC, SC, JO'R, KH. **Greater Flamingo [pres 91C]:** Tana River Delta 9–10/10/93 RR, JR, ON & KN; **[pres 88C]:** Amboseli, Kimana Camp 9–10/10/93 PH, RH, KP, JS, HS & JL. **Cape Wigeon [pres 51C]:** Nanyuki 9–10/10/93 LC, IC & AW. **Hottentot Teal [pres 75B]:** Magadi 9–10/10/93 DD, RD, SA, SL,SA & IDM. **African Black Duck [pres 76C]:** Three pairs along River Ikiwe, Machakos 1/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **Yellow-billed Duck [pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93 HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1. **White-backed Duck [post pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB, DC & MS; **[pres 62A]:** Lake Nakuru NP 9–10/10/93 IM, HM & AMK. **Spur-winged Goose [pres 51B]:** Samburu/Buffalo Springs 9–10/10/93 HCK & MHK. **Palm-nut Vulture [pres 91C]:** Tana River Delta 9–10/10/93 RR, JR, ON & KN. **African Marsh Harrier [pres 75C]:** Magadi 9–10/10/93 DD, RD, IDM, SA & SL. **Harrier Hawk [pres 75C]:** Magadi 9–10/10/94 DD, RD, IDM, SA & SL. **Levant Sparrowhawk [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK. **Great Sparrowhawk [pres 91C]:** Tana River Delta 9–10/10/93 RR, JR, ON & KN. **Tawny Eagle [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/94 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MM1, NG & MT. **Coqui Francolin [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/93 SH & IL; **[pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93

HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1. **Crested Francolin [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS; **[pres 62C]:** Hell's Gate MDC, FA, FGC, LJ, MW & EW. **Shelley's Francolin [pres 50A]:** Lake Baringo Island Camp 10/10/93 DL1, RN & DR1. **Scaly Francolin [pres 50B]:** Laikipia (Colcheccio/Kisima) 9–10/10/93 JC, AHG, NR & SS; **[post pres 75C]:** Ewaso Ngiro; **[pres 87A]:** Shompole, both 9–10/10/93 SH & IL. **Kenya Crested Guineafowl [pres 74A]:** The Ark, Aberdares 9–10/10/93 IH & NL. **Stone Patridge [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK. **Black-rumped Button Quail [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 CW, SN, MW & JI. **Crowned Crane [pres 114B]:** Mombasa 9–10/10/93 MR, NR, ML, PR, WW, IC & RM. **Black Crake [pres 114B]:** Mombasa 9–10/10/93 MR, NR, ML, PR, WW, IC & RM; **[post pres 76C]:** One along Ikiwe River, Machakos 1/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **African Water Rail [pres 74A]:** Masai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **Red-knobbed Coot [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Black-bellied Bustard [pres 91C]:** Tana River Delta 9–10/10/93 RR, JR, ON & KN; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/94 NM1, MG, MM, ME, MT, DM & NG. **Lesser Jacana [pres 50A]:** Lake Baringo Island Camp 10/10/93 DL1, RN & DR1. **Blacksmith Plover [pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93 HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1. **Spur-winged Plover [pres 74A]:** Mara Safari Camp 9–10/10/93 MC, KK & NS; **[pres 74A]:** Mara Safari Camp 9–10/10/93 MC, KK & NS. **Spotted Thicknee [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/94 SH & IL; **Red-necked Phalarope [pres 102D]:** Kilifi 21/2/91 NW. **Cream-coloured Courser [pres 50D]:** Ol Pejeta 9–10/10/93 DH, PH, JH & BJ. **Heuglin's Courser [pres 74A]:** Maasai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **Grey-headed Gull [pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93 HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1. **Lesser Black-backed Gull and Caspian Tern [both pres 91C]:** Tana River Delta 9–10/10/93 RR, JR, ON & KN. **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse [pres 50B]:** Laikipia (Colcheccio/Kisima) 9–10/10/93 JC, AH, NR & SS. **Bronze-naped Pigeon [pres 74A]:** Masai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **Speckled Pigeon [pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93 HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1. **Feral Pigeon [pres 74A]:** Mara Safari Camp 9–10/10/94 MC, KK & NS. **Namaqua Dove [pres 114B]:** Mombasa 9–10/10/93 MR, ML1, NR1, PR, WW, IC & RM. **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/94 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MM1 & NG **Yellow-collared Lovebird [pres 103A]:** Malindi 9–10/10/93 TG & JG; **[pres 89C]:** Tsavo East 9–10/10/93 LF, MG & NM. **Brown Parrot [pres 75B]:** Nairobi NP 10/10/93 JW, KW & YMC. (N.B. Small group also seen flying through garden. Upper Hill, Nairobi 8/73 YMC); **[pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/94 SH & IL. **Hartlaub's Turaco [pres 50B]:** Ol Pajeta 9–10/10/93 DH, PH, JH & BJ. **Didric Cuckoo [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Great Spotted Cuckoo:** Lukenya 20/3/94 YMC. **Black and White Cuckoo and African Cuckoo [both pres 36D] :** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Senegal Coucal [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 DR, JA, MS & DC. **Barn Owl [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 CW, SN, MW & JI; One calling, Waiyaki Close, Westlands Nairobi 9/6/94 CJ. **Spotted Eagle Owl [pres 51B]:** Samburu/Buffalo Spring 9–10/10/93 HCK & MHK. **Pearl-spotted Owlet [pres 101D]:** Rukinga and Taita Ranch 9–10/10/93 PB, ADC & DD. **White-faced Scops Owl [pres 102D]:** Sighted on two occasions at Kilifi South 20-21/5/94 DD & AD. **Scops Owl**

**[pres 75C]:** Magadi 9–10/10/93 DD, RD, IDM, SA & SL; **[pres 62A]:** Mau (Dundori Forest) 9–10/10/93 JAK, DMN, EPK & RJT. **Slender-tailed Nightjar [pres 50B]:** Laikipia (Colcheccio/Kisima) 9–10/10/93 JC, AH, NR & SS. **Montane Nightjar [pres 50D]:** Ol Pajeta DH, PH, JH & BJ; **[pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Freckled Nightjar [pres 75B]:** Lukenya Hill 19/3/93 JO, KN & YMC. **Pennant-winged Nightjar [pres 74C]:** Sekanani Camp 12-14/7/91 NW. **Black Swift [post pres 48D]:** Kakamega Forest 9–10/10/94 JOO, LAB, MC & GA. **White-rumped Swift [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/94 SH & IL. **Horus Swift [pres 51B]:** Samburu/Buffalo Spring 9–10/10/93 HCK & MHK. **Palm Swift [pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Giant Kingfisher [pres 76C]:** Two along River Ikiwe, Machakos 1/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **Shining-blue Kingfisher [pres 48C]:** Busia 9–10/10/93 DR, JA, MS & DC. **Woodland Kingfisher [pres 50D]:** Ol Pejeta 9–10/10/93 DH, PH, JH & BJ. **White-throated Bee-eater [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML; feeding with **Carmine** and **Eurasian Bee-eaters**, Kibwezi 2/94 YMC. **Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/94 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG. **Abyssinian Roller [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK. **Rufous-naped Roller [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Broad-billed Roller [pres 50D]:** Ol Pejeta 9–10/10/93 PH, DH, JH & BJ; **[pres 50D]:** Sweet Waters 9–10/10/93 ND, LD & MP. **Jackson's Hornbill [pres 50D]:** Ol Pajeta 9–10/10/93 DH, PH, JH & BJ. **Red-fronted Barbet [pres 91C]:** Tana River Delta 9–10/10/93 RR, JR, ON & KN; **[pres 103A]:** Malindi 9–10/10/93 TG & JG. **Spotted-flanked Barbet [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Black-throated Barbet [pres 63A]:** Naro Moru 9–10/10/93 ND, LD & MP. **Scaly-throated Honeyguide [pres 51B]:** Samburu/Buffalo Springs 9–10/10/93 HCK & MH; **[pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Eastern Honeybird [pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Red-throated Wryneck [pres 62C]:** Naivasha area 9–10/10/93 AD & CC. **Golden-tailed Woodpecker [pres 101D]:** Rukinga and Taita Ranch 9–10/10/93 PB, ADC & DD. **Fine-banded Woodpecker [pres 74A]:** Masai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **Grey Woodpecker [pres 63A]:** Kianyaga 9–10/10/93 PN, PGG & DM; **[pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93 HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1. **Brown-backed Woodpecker [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Rufous-naped Lark [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/94 SH & IL; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Northern White-tailed Bush Lark [pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Red-winged Bush Lark [pres 62C]:** Naivasha area 9–10/10/93 AD & CC. **Angola Swallow [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/94 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG; **[pres 87A]:** Shombole 9–10/10/93 SH & IL. **African Rock Martin [pres 74C]:** Sekanani Camp 12-14/7/94 NW. **African Sand Martin [post pres 76C]:** Several along River Ikiwe, Machakos 2/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **Grey-rumped Swallow [pres 50B]:** Laikipia (Colcheccio/Kisima) 10/10/93 JC, AH, NR & SS. **Rufous-chested Swallow [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Mosque Swallow [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/94 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, ME & NG. **African Sand Martin [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Square-tailed Drongo:** Cottars Camp, Tsavo 29/3/91 NW. **African**

**Golden Oriole [pres 62C]:** Lake Naivasha area 9–10/10/93 GI, DI & HN; **[pres 76A]:** Thika 9–10/10/93 JP, TP, MH, PH1, JO'R & KH; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Pied Crow [pres 89A]:** Cottars Camp, Tsavo 29/3/91 NW. **White-bellied Tit [pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **African Penduline Tit [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS; **[pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit [pres 76A]:** Thika 9–10/10/93 JP, TP, MH, PH1, AC, JO'R & KH; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Northern Pied Babbler [pres 63A]:** Kianyaga 9–10/10/93 PN, PGG & DM; **[pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Scaly Babbler [post pres 114B]:** Shanzu, Mombasa 5/94 YMC. **Rufous Chatterer [pres 62A]:** Lake Nakuru NP 9–10/10/93; **[pres 76C]:** One along River Ikiwe and two along River Potha, Machakos 2-3/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **Black Cuckoo Shrike [pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **White-breasted Cuckoo Shrike [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/94 JB1, DC & MS. **Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul [pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN JO & DR2. **Yellow-bellied Greenbul [post pres 88B]:** Kibwezi Forest 2/94 YMC. **Red-tailed Chat [pres 75B]:** Lukenya Hill 20/3/94 JO,KN & YMC. **Red-capped Robin Chat:** Kibwezi Forest 2/94 YMC. **Rüppell's Robin Chat [pres 50D]:** Ol Pejeta 9–10/10/93 PH, DH, JH & BJ **Capped Wheatear** [pres 52C]: Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Northern Olive Thrush [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK; **[pres 89C]:** Tsavo East 9–10/10/93 LF, MG & NM. **African Reed Warbler [pres 74A]:** Masai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **Lesser Swamp Warbler [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS; **[pres 76A]:** Thika 9–10/10/93 JP, TP, MH, AC, PH, JO'R & KH. **Yellow-breasted Apalis [pres 101D]:** Rukinga and Taita Ranch 9–10/10/93 PB, ADC & DD. **Black-headed Apalis [pres 62A]:** Mau (Dundori forest) 9–10/10/93 JAK, EPK & RJT. **Black-collared Apalis [pres 76A]:** Thika 9–10/10/93 JP, TP, MH, PH1, AC, JO'R & KH. **Desert Cisticola [pres 75C]:** Magadi 9–10/10/93 DD, RD, IDM, SA & SL. **Boran Cisticola [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 DR, JA, MS & DC. **Siffling Cisticola [pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Pectoral-patch Cisticola [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG; **[pres 51C]:** Nanyuki 9–10/10/93 LC, IC & AW. **Singing Cisticola [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS; **[pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Rattling Cisticola [post pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS; **[post pres 48D]:** Kakamega Forest 9–10/10/94 JOO, LAB, GA & MC. **Winding Cisticola [pres 51B]:** Samburu/Buffalo Spring 9–10/10/93 HCK & MHK; **[pres 51C]:** Nanyuki 9–10/10/93 LC, IC & AW; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Hunter's Cisticola [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK. **Zitting Cisticola [pres 114B]:** Mombasa 9–10/10/93 MR, ML1, NR1, PR, WW, IC & RM; **[pres 50D]:** Ol Pajeta 9–10/10/93 DH, PH, JH & BJ; **[pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 DR, JA, MS & DC. **Stout Cisticola [post pres 48D]:** Kakamega Forest 9–10/10/94 JOO, LAB, GA & MC; **[pres 51C]:** Nanyuki 9–10/10/93 LC, IC & AW. **Foxy Cisticola [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Yellow-bellied Eremomela [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MRT, MM & NG.

**Tawny-flanked Prinia [pres 51B]:** Samburu/Buffalo Spring 9–10/10/93 HCK & MHK. **Brown Parisoma [post pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Red-faced Crombec [pres 114B]:** Mombasa 9–10/10/93 MR, ML1, NR1, PR, WW, IC & RM; **[pres 52C]:** Meru National Park 9–10/10/93 TG, PG & RT. **Grey Flycatcher [pres 103A]:** Malindi 9–10/10/93 TG & JG. **Black Flycatcher [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK; **[pres 75C]:** Magadi 9–10/10/94 DD, RD, IDM, SA & SL; **[pres 62A]:** Gilgil 9–10/10/93 JB & JOn. **Southern Black Flycatcher [pres 76C]:** Three along River Potha, Machakos 2-3/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **Dusky Fycatcher [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG. **Pale Flycatcher and Paradise Flycatcher [both pres 101D]:** Rukinga & Taita Ranch 9–10/10/93 PB, ADC & DD. **White-tailed Crested Flycatcher [pres 62A]:** Gilgil 9–10/10/93 JB & JOn. **Plain-backed Pipit [post pres 48D]:** Kakamega Forest 9–10/10/94 JOO, LAB, GA & MC. **Richard's Pipit [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/94 SH & IL; **Yellow-throated Longclaw [pres 101D]:** Rukinga & Taita Ranch 9–10/10/93 PB, ADC & DD. **African Pied Wagtail [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/94 SH & IL. **Mountain Wagtail [pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Golden Pipit [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG. **Black-backed Puffback [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/93 SH & IL; **[pres 51C]:** Nanyuki 9–10/10/93 LC, IC & AW. **Yellow-billed Shrike [pres 49A]:** Eldoret NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG. **Long-tailed Fiscal [pres 50D]:** Ol Pajeta 9–10/10/93 DH, PH, JH & BJ. **Fiscal [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/94 SH & IL. **Three-streaked Tchagra [pres 91C]:** Tana River Delta 9–10/10/93 RR, JR, ON & KN. **Brown-headed Tchagra [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK. **Black-headed Tchagra [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93. **Helmet Shrike [pres 50D]:** Sweet Waters 9–10/10/93 ND, LD & MP; **[post pres 36D]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Abbot's Starling [post pres 75B]:** Gatamayu Forest 3/94 JO & YMC. **Wattled Starling [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Red-winged Starling [pres 74A]:** Mara Safari camp 9–10/10/93 MC, KK & NS. **Superb Starling [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG. **Amethyst Sunbird [pres 50B]:** Laikipia (Colcheccio/Kisima) 9–10/10/93 JC, AH, NR & SS; **[pres 74a]:** Mara Safari Camp 9–10/10/93 MC, KK & NS. **Mariqua Sunbird [pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Grosbeak Weaver [pres 76C]:** One male along River Ikiwe, Machakos 1/7/94 JOO, PN & JW. **Parasitic Weaver [post pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG. **Golden Palm Weaver [pres 89C]:** Tsavo East 9–10/10/93 LF. MG & NM. **Little Weaver [pres 50B]:** Laikipia (Colcheccio/Kisima) JC, NR, AH & SS. **Golden-backed Weaver [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Black-billed Weaver [pres 62B]:** The Ark, Aberdares 9–10/10/93 IH & NL. **Black-necked Weaver [pres 51B]:** Samburu/Buffalo Springs 9–10/10/93 HCK & MHK. **Masked Weaver [pres 52C]:** Meru National Park 9–10/10/93 TG, PG & RT. **Red-billed Quelea [pres 49A]: Eldoret** 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, ME, MT, MM & NG. **White-headed Buffalo Weaver [pres 75C]:** Oltepesi, off Magadi road 27/3/94 NW. **Rufous Sparrow [pres 52C]: Near Meru** NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Steel-blue Whydah [pres**

**89A]:** Cottars Camp, Tsavo 29/3/91 NW **Yellow-spotted Petronia [pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Red-billed Firefinch Indigobird [pres 62C]:** Naivasha area 9–10/10/93 AD & CC. **Fawn-breasted Waxbill [pres 74A]:** Maasai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **African Firefinch [pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Quailfinch [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS. **Cut-throat [pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 TT, CK & ML. **Bronze Mannikin [pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **[pres 76C]:** Several along River Ikiwe, Machakos 1–3/7/94 JOO, JW & PN. **Silver-bill [pres 76A]:** Thika 9–10/10/93 JP, TP, MH, AC, JO'R & KH. **Golden-breasted Bunting [pres 101D]:** Rukinga & Taita Ranch 9–10/10/93 PB, ADC & DD. **Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting [pres 36D]:** Kanyarakwat 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS; **[pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93 HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1. **Thick-billed Seed-eater [pres 74A]:** Masai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **African Citril [pres 50B]:** Laikipia (Colcheccio/Kisima) JC, NR, AH & SS; **[pres 49A]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 NM1, MG, MN, MT, ME & NG; **[pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2. **Streaky-headed Seed-eater [pres 37C]:** Saiwa Swamp 9–10/10/93 JB1, DC & MS **Yellow-fronted Canary** [pres 76A]: Thika 9–10/10/93 JP, TP, MH, AC, JO'R & KH; **[pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Streaky Seed-eater [pres 51B]:** Mount Ololokwi 9–10/10/93 ST, BD1 & VK; **[pres 52C]:** Near Meru NP 9–10/10/93 AG, MM, CN, JO & DR2; **[pres 63D]:** Mwea 9–10/10/93 HB, RT1, DC1 & TG1.

## Other records: Palaearctic species

**Caspian Plover [pres 62A]:** Elmenteita 9–10/10/93 WO, FK & HA. **Ringed Plover [pres 74A]:** Masai Mara 9–10/10/93 ES, PM, NLM & DAT. **Curlew [pres 37C]:** Eldoret 9–10/10/93 CW, SN, MW & JI. **Whimbrel [pres 75B]:** Nairobi, Karen area 10/10/93 MDG. **Golden Oriole [pres 87A]:** Shompole 9–10/10/94 SH & IL. **Whinchat [pres 74A]:** Maasai Mara 9–10/10/93. **Yellow Wagtail [post pres 89A]:** Cottars Camp, Tsavo 29/3/91 NW. **Lesser Grey Shrike [post pres 37C]:** Kitale area 4/94 PLP & YMC. **Olivaceous Warbler, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Garden Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher, Red-backed Shrike, Red-tailed Shrike:** All in garden, Upper Hill Rd., Nairobi 16–18/4/94 YMC.

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## Mad Fish goes home

In the last issue of *Kenya Birds* I explained the plight of one individual Madagascar Fish Eagle who had been brought back to Kenya to recover from a broken wing. Because of complications with the paperwork required for re-export, Heather Tarpley, who had been trained to handle the bird, had to leave for Madagascar without the eagle. A few days later on 18 February 1994 I turned up early at Jomo Kenyatta Airport with the bird and faced the normal chaos. An official refused to pass the bird through cargo as the permission was written in French. I then proceeded to the passenger terminal and managed to force the bird through on its free Air Madagascar flight in the company of two volunteer chaperons.

Three hours later, Heather and Richard Lewis of the Peregrine Fund picked up the eagle amidst intense interest. The eagle was named 'Lova' which in Malagash means 'heritage'. It has undoubtedly become one of the best known wildlife individuals in Madagascar.

Lova and Heather boarded a UNESCO aircraft and flew west to the bird's home lakes in the Antsalova region. There they were both met by the Peregrine Fund team and escorted to most of the fishing villages. Lova perched contentedly on Heather's gloved fist and the team explained to the villagers the role and rarity of this eagle to the people.

Then began Lova's introduction to fishing, and defending her territory. Although Lova had been trained and flown free in Kenya, it was sensible to start the training process again on the lakes. First she was put on a creance, a long line, and encouraged to fly to a dead fish on shore. This was not easy as the shore and forest floor were covered in water due to three recent cyclones. Then Lova flew to dead fish floating on the water. Finally the creance was removed, and she could fly across the bay to floating fish. During these flights she met the resident Fish Eagles who, as expected, attached her. This became a real problem as both would connect over water and hit the surface, still in battle. Heather's letter told of miserable encounters with unforgiving adults. So frequent were the attacks that Lova spent much of the day standing on the forest floor hidden from view.

On 9 March Lova caught a live fish, while Heather was standing neck deep in crocodile-infested water swinging a dead fish around her head on a bit of string. Lova went on to catch more fish with apparent ease. Later she managed to cope with the attacking adults and would perch in the more normal Fish Eagle manner.

The only disappointment is the fact that Lova, taken and reared from an early age by people, remains with little fear of people. She is not imprinted onto people... at least she knows that she is an eagle and not a human. But she does not see people as enemies, despite everyone but Heather being asked to behave aggressively to her and frighten her away. She stole a fish from a fisherman, fortunately from an admiring one. But she must soon learn that people are not all good, or she may be killed.

The rehabilitation of wild animals is not easy in every circumstance. The simple reason is that the wild is cruel. Having rescued her as a shattered chick below her fallen nest and got her flying again has made me and many other concerned about her future. This concern can change attitudes, and that more than anything is good for the conservation of her species. — *Simon Thomsett, P O Box 42818, Nairobi.*

## Captive breeding of endangered bird species

In Kenya captive breeding is little known as a means of conserving endangered animal species, and especially so for birds. Perhaps in the past such measures were not needed, but in the near future captive breeding is likely to become more and more necessary as a way of preventing species becoming extinct.

Several of Kenya's birds are under severe threat and in great danger of complete extinction within a very short time. For instance the future of the Sokoke Forest endemics and Red Data Book species (Sokoke Scops Owl Otus *ireneae*, Clarke's Weaver Ploceus golandi, East Coast Akalat *Sheppardia gunningi*, Spotted Ground Thrush *Turdus fischeri*, Amani Sunbird *Anthreptes*

*pallidigaster* and Sokoke Pipit *Anthus sokokensis*) and the Hinde's Babbler *Turdoides hindei* from the northern slopes of Mount Kenya is uncertain, to say the least.

But how can captive breeding programmes be beneficial for the survival of these species? First of all it is important to note that captive breeding can never be the complete solution for a conservation problem. Captive breeding is emergency management. It can help the species survive for a certain amount of time, be it a few years or several decades. But there is absolutely no point in trying to establish a captive breeding programme without efforts at the same time to improve the situation in the wild.

There are many successful captive breeding programmes that have succeeded in saving a species and even reintroducing it back into the wild. For instance the Pink Pigeon *Nesoenas mayeri* and Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus*, both from the island of Mauritius, would probably be extinct today if it had not been for a captive breeding programme started by the Mauritius government and the Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust. The same applies to the Whooping Crane *Grus americana*, California Condor *Gymnogyps californianus*, St. Lucia Parrot *Amazona versicolor* and many others, to draw examples from birds alone. In all, over a hundred animal species have been saved from extinction by programmes in which captive breeding played a vital role.

What makes captive breeding a useful tool in species conservation? Captive breeding gives us a range of possibilities for population management that are difficult or impossible to obtain in the wild. First, all the captive specimens can be protected against immediate physical danger from predators and extreme climatic conditions (e.g. hurricanes, fires, drought). It is a well known fact that longevity for most species is better for captive animals than in the wild. (This of course requires good housing and husbandry, but we may take this for granted in a serious and well-managed captive breeding project.) Secondly the productivity of the captive population can be higher than that of the wild birds. There are a number of reasons for this. The birds are likely to live longer and hence have more years for reproduction. They need little energy to find food and fulfil their other basic needs, so more time and energy are available for reproduction. And lastly the productivity can be enormously improved by human manipulation, for instance by practising 'double clutching'. This means that the first clutch is removed from the parents after a few days of incubation, after which the eggs are placed under foster parents or in an incubator. Most bird species will produce a replacement clutch, so that the productivity of the parents can be doubled. For the same reasons as mentioned before (protection from predators and climate,

abundant food etc.) the survival rate of the young may be several times higher than that in the wild.

A very great benefit of captive breeding is the possibility of genetic management. This is extremely important in small populations, since the risk of losing genetic variation is very high. Management of captive populations can ensure that genetic erosion is kept to an absolute minimum. To achieve this it is important that as many individuals of the original stock with which the project started (the founders) take part in reproduction; at the same time, certain founders must be prevented from becoming genetically over-represented in the population. Thus it might be necessary to exclude animals that are part of captive breeding programmes from reproducing after they have produced a lot of offspring.

Captive breeding programmes can also attract attention to the conservation of the species as a whole, and this function can be extremely important. Captive breeding centres often double as education centres, where the local people can learn about the species, its ecosystem, the threats it faces and how they themselves can support its survival. This is extremely important because in most cases human influences are one of the reasons for the species' decline. Very often people are not aware of the effects of their practices, and are willing to look into alternatives if this means an improvement of the condition of the endangered species' ecosystem. Of course this is especially so when they become aware that they are as dependent on that ecosystem as are the endangered birds.

The last function of captive breeding programmes is scientific research. In a lot of cases even basic information about a species is lacking or insufficiently known. Being able to study the animals in a captive situation can greatly enhance the knowledge of such aspects as behaviour, reproduction and physiological characteristics. In turn this knowledge is often of great value in drawing up effective conservation strategies for the species in the wild.

In conclusion we can say that captive breeding can be an important tool for species conservation, as long as the following things are taken into consideration:

1. Captive breeding is not in itself a solution for conservation problems, but should be considered 'emergency management'.

2. The programme must have a sound, scientific foundation and be managed well by knowledgeable people.

3. The captive population must require intensive management to prevent loss of genetic diversity.

At the moment there are no captive breeding programmes for birds in Kenya. Things are changing rapidly and 'emergency management' may be necessary in the near future. In that case captive breeding may prove a successful tool for preventing species from disappearing forever. — *Bart Hiddinga, Landstraat 12, 7413 RB Deventer, Netherlands*

# The rescue, rehabilitation and release of 'Houdini', an Augur Buzzard

Soon after the start of the September 1992 school term, the students of St. Andrew's School, Turi, 'rescued' an injured Augur Buzzard. One wing was damaged and hung open uselessly. The students handed the bird to the overworked, renowned veterinarian, Huge Cran, of Nakuru. By good fortune I had just returned home from overseas. On my first morning back I received a call from Nakuru asking whether we could take over an injured Augur Buzzard. Naturally, I said "yes".

Augur Buzzard — *Simon Thomsett*

We duly made the necessary arrangements and 'Houdini' came into our life. He was transported to Kericho and placed in the Rest and Recuperation cage in our garden, Sheltered by trees but with plenty of sun and shade, the R'n'R cage is six foot by six foot by four foot wide, allowing 'Houdi' plenty of space but also permitting me to monitor his progress, nutrition and well being. Inside we placed three crossover perches at varying heights to ensure comfort and movement. The diameter of perches is of great importance for any bird in captivity. Huge Cran had already ascertained that there were no broken bones in the wing, but it just hung open and loose: it seemed that the pectoral muscle was damaged.

I inspected Houdi closely but was unable to determine his (or her) sex. This was an immature bird of 18–20 months. Augur Buzzards take up to three years to become mature and moult into full adult plumage. Females are larger than the male and similarly coloured,. except that the female has darker and more extensive spotting from the beak down the side of the neck. Houdi was still more

brown than slate on the upperside of the wings. The uppertail coverts were a lovely rich rufous, the tail, though rufous, still had heavy dark barring, and there were occasional dark feathers on the otherwise white throat and breast.

Houdi was dazed and disoriented for the first few days, then gradually started to gain confidence and to move about more rapidly. Strips of meat were placed on the perches morning and evening. The ocular vision of birds of prey is geared to looking down or horizontally over a distance. They intensely dislike being forced to look up at a close object. Normally on approaching the cage I would crouch down for the last few metres. Occasionally, as a form of homespun physiotherapy, I would just suddenly appear, accompanied by my two large dogs. Houdi would rear up, spreading his wings, in a natural defensive posture. The object of this exercise was to help strengthen that damaged wing. Daily the wing became stronger. It no longer fell open and was returning to the correct position.

By mid-October Houdi was able to fly up and down from the ground to any height of perch. He started dropping on the to ground at my approach with food, then pouncing on the meat as I put it in the cage and smothering it, as in the wild. I now gave large chunks of meat which had to be torn up, and which arrived at any time of day — much more the type of eating regime Houdi would have had in the wild. Contrary to popular belief, it is not necessary for raptors to pellet (i.e., regurgitate undigested bones, fur and so on): this is simply a convenient way of getting rid of excess waste material. However, in rehabilitation cases it is considered beneficial, once in a while, to offer fur in the meal: this helps to clean grease and fatty deposits from the crop. Thus Houdi was offered the occasional piece of meat which I'd pounded and covered with fur from my dogs' coats. But every time this was offered, Houdi, now well balanced, flew with the furry chunk onto a perch and proceeded to pluck it clean before tearing it up and eating it. I never found a pellet.

Towards the end of October Houdi's new home became a wired fruit cage, in which we made a steeplechase of perches. The flying practice went well. Visitors could no longer tell which had been the damaged wing. Houdi was now looking very confident and the time for release was at hand. On 10 November I duly took Houdi from the fruit cage. Houdi showed with unusual patience for a raptor and I was allowed to weigh and measure and affix a metal ring (D2070 EANHS) to the right tarsus. Then with mixed feelings of sorrow, joy and apprehension I walked with Houdi to the front garden, which slopes steeply down to gallery forest abutting the arboretum.

After sitting for a while on the branch where I had placed him, Houdi flew in gentle steps to the crown of a tree and surveyed the horizon. He flew to the top of

a taller bare tree and inspected the ring in the manner of someone consulting a watch. Then with the grace of a true aviator he flew off towards the arboretum.

Since then Houdi has been sighted on several occasions in and around the arboretum and in the garden. So far there appears to have been no plumage change, so it is possible that Houdi is a male. — Kimbo Beak*bane, BBK, P O Box 20, Kericho.*

## Bird shower records

Species using bird shower in a Thika garden include: Grey Woodpecker (rarely); Speckled and Blue-naped Mousebirds; Northern Pied Babbler; Scarlet-chested, Bronze, Variable and Mariqua Sunbirds; White-browed Sparrow Weaver; and Red-headed, Grosbeak, Spectacled, Black-headed, Holub's Golden, Reichenow's and Chestnut Weavers. — *Michelle Jenner, P O Box 260, Thika.*

## Dead quails outside Nairobi Cinema

My route to work in the morning takes me past the front of the Nairobi Cinema. On 11 November 1993 I was surprised to find a recently dead male Harlequin Quail lying on the pavement outside the cinema at about 07:15. On 20 June 1994 I found another male Harlequin Quail, also recently dead, in the same place at exactly the same time. This species is known to make large-scale nocturnal movements, and sometimes to kill itself striking lighted windows. I wonder how many deaths occur of quail overflying Nairobi that go unreported? — On*esmas Kahindi, P O Box 59749, Nairobi.*

## White-backed Night Herons and bird-eating storks in Nairobi National Park

Nairobi National Park was breathtakingly beautiful at the end of May 1994. Grass grew tall and thick as far as the eye could see, brimming over with grassland birds. In one morning's visit on 29 May 1994, we were delighted — and astonished — to see the following:

• A pair of White-backed Night Herons at Hippo Pools, at about 11 a.m. The Athi River was swollen with muddy water, giving us only a glimpse of swimming terrapins. At the far end of the trail, there was some movement in a large tree overhanging the river. As the bird walked up the branch, I thought at first it was a green-backed heron. Then the two herons flew over the river to an overhanging tree a little further away, giving clear views of the dark plumage and striking white back, the rufous neck, dark top of the head and fancy white eye makeup. It was a life bird for me, and right here in Nairobi!

• A Woolly-necked Stork at the Athi Basin Dam, together with various herons, egrets, storks and spoonbills. We had seen an Open-billed Stork there on May 15, and both storks were also seen by Mike and Lynn Noel recently.

Saddle-billed Stork
*— Dale Zimmerman*

• A Saddle-billed Stork catching a bird in flight, killing and eating it. As we approached Hyena Dam, we saw two splendid Saddle-billed Storks flying in and landing in the tall grass where the water from the dam drains. Then as we drove over the wall of the dam, my daughter Amolo and our friends saw the drama unfold. A dove-sized bird was flying around in circles, with the Saddle-billed Stork in pursuit. The stork caught the bird in mid-air, landed and killed its prey by squeezing it with its beak several times. The prey bird was dark grey with white in the wings, and had rather long yellow-orange legs. The stork started to swallow it whole, but the legs kept sticking out. Eventually the stork swallowed its unusual prey.

• Small grassland birds in abundance and variety. They included Rosy–breasted Longclaw and Rufous-naped Lark, Jackson's, Red–collared and White-winged Widowbirds, Cardinal Quelea, Chestnut Sparrow, Rufous Sparrow, Pin-tailed Whydah, Zebra Waxbill, Waxbill, Quailfinch, Yellow–rumped Seed Eater, and Wattled Starlings, all in breeding plumage. — *Fleur Ng'weno, P O Box 42271, Nairobi.*

## Marabou Stork preys on Blacksmith Plover

It was around 13:00 at the Dandora Sewage Treatment Works on 15 May 1994. A Marabou Stork landed in front of us and walked to the edge of one of the ponds. It disappeared over the edge and in a moment we saw feathers flying, although we heard no sound from anything. The Marabou then reappeared holding a Blacksmith Plover in its beak. It put the plover on the ground, then raised it, apparently to see if it was dead. The plover was still flapping its wings weakly. When the Marabou put the plover down again we chased it away to see if we could save the plover, but its neck and back were broken and we were forced to leave it for the stork. — *Jennifer Oduori and Reijo Hakanen, P O Box 44486, Nairobi.*

## More Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbirds at Tana

The Uluguru Violet Backed Sunbird *Anthreptes neglectus* is one of Kenya's least recorded birds with only about six published sight or collection records. The known range of this sunbird extends from coastal Mozambique through eastern Tanzania to the coastal lowlands of Kenya. In Kenya, however, it is only known from four sites: Makere West Forest on the lower Tana River, Shimba Hills, Jadini Forest and Buda Forest.

During about 24 days in February, March and June 1994 I visited nearly all of the 55 or so riverine forest patches along the lower Tana River as part of an extensive survey of the region's endangered primates. Throughout the survey I was also able to search for some of the rarer birds reported along the lower Tana River. I was particularly interested in sighting *A. neglectus* and *Apalis chariessa.*, the White-winged Apalis. The one and only previous record for *A. neglectus* in Tana River forests was made 32 years ago (in 1962).

On 19 February I had a brief, but good, view of a female *A. neglectus* near the centre of Kitere Forest (c.18 ha) in the Tana River Primate National Reserve. I returned to this forest on 8 June and spent three hours following an unusually large, slow moving, bird party in which a male and female *A. neglectus* were present. Both birds were seen clearly on several occasions under good light conditions. These are apparently only the second and third sightings of this species north of Mombasa, and the first for this Reserve.

While *A. neglectus* is certainly one of the rarer birds in the forests of the lower Tana River it is also one that is apparently easily over-looked. Forest loss in the region has been considerable during the last several decades, but there still remain a good number of small to medium-sized evergreen forests in which careful search might reveal the presence of *A. neglectus*. Much more research is needed to determine the status of *A. neglectus, A. chariessa* and other rare birds in the forests of the lower Tana river. *—Tom Butynski, Zoo Atlanta/National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi.*

*[Editors' note: For recent records of the Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird in Shimba (Mkongani) and Buda Forests, see* Kenya Birds *1(2): 26 and 2(2): 29.]*

# Quelea control and its potential to destroy raptors and other non-target species

Simon Thomsett
P O Box 42818, Nairobi

The Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea* is a 20 g weaver that can be a serious pest on cultivated cereal crops in Africa. At least KSh. 40 million worth of grain is lost to these birds every year.

**Control method**

Quelea have been controlled by persecution. In an effort to depress the population, avicides — bird-killing chemicals — and explosives have been extensively employed. Organophosphate insecticides such as Parathion and Fenthion are extremely toxic to quelea and are generally sprayed directly onto the birds from an aircraft or a ground sprayer. An estimated one billion Quelea are killed annually throughout Africa in this way.

Fenthion inhibits the enzyme cholinesterase (ChE), which results in an accumulation of acetylcholine, a waste product, between nerve synapses. Nerve failure results and can lead to death in as little as 3–12 hours. When sprayed on the birds the application kills by contact with the skin. Some 80% of the birds' surface area is covered in feathers; doses of avicide that are not enough to kill a bird may be carried on the feathers for long periods as droplets. Death may eventually occur after birds ingest the droplets while preening, or through skin contact. Dying quelea have been seen up to 19 days after a spray.

**Non-target deaths**

The use of pesticides against Red-billed Quelea, locusts, and rodents has often lead to the deaths of large numbers of raptors, insectivorous birds and storks in Africa. Non-target species are often killed, accidentally or deliberately, as a result of Quelea spraying operations. For example flocks of Wattled Starlings feeding on the wheat fields of Embori Farm in 1984 were deliberately destroyed, despite the fact that they are wholly insectivorous.

Breeding colonies and roosts of queleas provide easily obtained prey and are highly attractive to raptors. Predator densities may be 70–500 times greater near a colony than elsewhere. The erratic movements of defenceless dying Quelea and other birds evoke an attack response from raptors even when they are fully gorged. The prolonged period of mortality increases the total area and time in which contaminated quelea are exposed to predation.

It has been estimated that a Tawny Eagle would die after eating 40 poisoned quelea, a Chanting Goshawk after eating 12 and a Pygmy Falcon after eating one-and-a-bit. A smaller number of dying quelea would be fatal if they were eaten directly after a spray, when they may contain as much as 100 mg of organophosphate.

Fenthion is widely regarded as a non-residual poison which breaks down quickly and, while lethal to quelea, is not very toxic to other animals and has a small effect on the ecological cycle. But it does remain toxic to quelea, and other birds, for at least nine days. This is the minimum period in which dying birds are providing an easy and 'irresistible' food source to raptors.

Dead Quelea present less of a hazard to many raptors, which prefer to take like prey. However, I have seen scavenging raptors, as well as typically non-scavenging species such as Black Kites, Tawny Eagles, and (unexpectedly) Augur Buzzards and Gabar Goshawks, feeding on piles of collected dead quelea at Timau in 1984. Studies have shown that small carnivorous mammals remove the majority of the dead quelea during the night. In areas where there are few mammalian scavengers, the dead quelea are presumably more available to birds of prey, and the potential for poisoning raptor populations is clear.

**Effects of sub-lethal doses of Fenthion**

The effect of sub-lethal doses on raptors is not sufficiently known. Chlorinesterase levels in the blood and brain were measured in raptors during a carefully managed and controlled spray near Sala. Kenya in 1985. Sixteen raptors out of 23 examined in or near to the spray were affected. My own experience is that such disabled raptors invariably die despite appropriate treatment, so it is doubtful if these birds would have survived. The long-term effects from sub-lethal doses on birds of prey are unknown.

**Pesticide application and lack of control**

The 1985 Sala operation was notable for its precise timing, minimal drift, and the use of (only) 40 to 100 litres Queleatox (Fenthion 50%) on breeding colonies of 10 and 40 hectares respectively. Generally the results were a successful eradication of Quelea, and a minimal effect on non-target species — except raptors. However, the summary of a report on this spray concludes with the warning: "Using Fenthion as an avicide presents lethal and sub-lethal threats to predatory and insectivorous birds".

The spray against comparatively small roosts of quelea in Timau in 1984 was disorganised and repeated, and this definitely contributed to more deaths of non-target species. The operation extended throughout June and July (and continued sporadically to December) and employed the use of aircraft, a ground sprayer,

peripheral spraying of wheat, poisoning of water troughs, and explosives. No statistics were available on the amount of Fenthion used, as individuals carried out their own operations independently. In many cases very small roosts of quelea were targeted, making the cost of the exercise disproportionate to the reward. For instance, a grand total of three quelea were killed by two contracted aerial sprays. The ground sprayer was used extensively for the first time during this period. Low volume techniques, such as the ground sprayer, may be hazardous because of the difficulty of controlling drift from the target zone, and the prolonged period of mortality. Aerial spraying of the wooded valleys, peripheral spraying of wheat, and poisoning water troughs showed little or no concern for non-target species, as available roosting, drinking and foraging areas were sometimes sprayed.

Juvenile Shikra — *Simon Thomsett*

In contrast the use of napalm was generally successful, since it was both effective and target-specific.

Crop contents of doves caught by trained Peregrine Falcons at Lewa Downs, 30 km away, revealed wheat, suggesting that Fenthion can disperse for at least this distance. In the adjacent Mt Kenya National Park I picked up dead Speckled Pigeons and Swallow-tailed Kites poisoned by the avicide.

It was apparent that the private operations conducted against Quelea in Timau in 1984 lacked co-ordination, basic safety precautions, and the ornithological skills required to identify the pest species.

**Raptor mortality**

On one study site, Embori Farm, earlier counts had revealed a high density of raptors. Tawny Eagles, Augur Buzzards, Black-shouldered Kites, Black Kites, Kestrel, Mackinder's Eagle Owl and Forest Buzzard were all present and their numbers well known. A total of 100 birds of prey were known from an area of 9000 acres. After the spraying operations in July only 12 Tawny Eagles and two Augur Buzzards remained. In this area 41 raptors were counted from the air in

October 1981. In July 1984 only two individual raptors were seen, a Secretary Bird and an Augur Buzzard, during a more extensive aerial survey.

Dead individuals of five raptor species were found within 30 m of a road through the site on the 18 July 1984. Unfortunately local co-operation was minimal and more extensive searches were not possible. Nonetheless, 41 dead raptors were collected within five weeks and dead and dying raptors were reported through to early 1985, following intermittent spraying operations.

Yearly road counts (up to 1992) in this area reveal a drastically reduced raptor population. For example it is now normal to count only three Augur Buzzards from Kigango to Isiolo, whereas in 1982 three road counts revealed 10, 15 and 14.

It is unlikely that the Timau operation is unique. Similar non-target deaths are probably repeated wherever this technique is used, especially by untrained personnel, although there are rarely the data to demonstrate this. In 1985 39,417 litres of Fenthion were sprayed over 23,370 ha by known agencies, suggesting that its effect on non-target species must be extensive.

**Overall effects of quelea spraying operations**

Quelea have been persecuted for over 30 years and yet the threat to grain crops remains relatively unchanged. Quelea are able to make up their lost numbers very rapidly, but raptors cannot as they have a far lower reproductive rate.

Overall numbers of quelea have probably diminished through habitat destruction, and the decline of fertile grasslands. Raptor populations have certainly declined, principally because of habitat destruction. Local eradication of large numbers of raptors have, and continue to occur through spraying operations aimed at Quelea. At Timau in 1985 the quelea operations eradicated all but two species of raptor. The quelea still remain a problem, however.

Raptors assist the wheat farmer by eating harmful insects, mole rats, rodents and many seed-eating birds... in particular quelea. In the case of quelea their impact is not so much that they destroy some individuals, but that they maintain the normal fright behaviour of their prey. Raptors flying over wheatlands disturb the feeding quelea, and doves (who feed on fallen grain). They assume the role of a 'scare crow' and multiplied by a hundred they must save the farmer a lot of wheat. Without raptors the quelea can feed unmolested.

**Action required**

The use of pesticides to kill quelea is a serious threat to raptors. In Kenya the impact on non-target species has rarely been studied and the problems are often ignored. These impacts can be considerably reduced if basic precautions are taken. Enforcing these precautions can seldom be achieved if the poisons and the application methods are left to the farmers' discretion.

The use of pesticides on birds must still be considered experimental. Despite 30 years of practice crucial questions remain unanswered. For instance, the long-term effects of sub-lethal doses of Fenthion are unknown. Low volume spraying (such as the ground sprayer) may increase environmental contamination and its use should be restricted. If spraying is considered to have an overall impact on quelea (and this is debatable) it should be conducted during a time of the year when raptors are least abundant. Spraying during peak migration times is obviously exposing more birds than necessary. A spray should not be attempted unless the quelea constitute a reasonable threat.

# Identification first aid: Female sunbirds of the Kenya highlands

Don Turner, P O Box 48019, Nairobi
Dale Zimmerman, Silver City, New Mexico, USA
Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

Some of the most interesting and conspicuous species in and around highland forests, and in nearby patches of grassland and moorland, are the sunbirds. Many species undergo altitudinal movements, migrating to lower altitudes during the cold damp season, then returning to breed at higher elevations in the warm weather. At the right time of year, at least six or seven species can be seen in one place.

Male sunbirds are, by and large, easy to identify: but what about the females — dull-coloured, drab and difficult? In his field guide, Williams advises that they are "best recognised by their associated males". Most birders will regard this as a cop-out, especially since the males are not always so obliging as to be on hand when you want them. In fact (as usual), the females are really not that hard once you get to know them. This short guide is intended to help. We concentrate on plumage, since sunbird calls are hard to describe on the page, and tend to be rather similar: some species do have their characteristic sounds, however, and it is worth listening as well as looking.

**Green-headed Sunbird** *Nectarinia verticalis* and **Collared Sunbird** *Anthreptes collaris*. These are easy. The females have metallic plumage like the males, only slightly less so, lacking the metallic green throat in both cases. The Green-headed has a metallic green head, the Collared a metallic green head, back and tail.

**Northern Double-collared Sunbird** *Nectarinia preussi kikuyuensis*. A very small sunbird with a short, only slightly curved bill; olive-brown above with

greenish-yellow underparts. There is an olive wash on the flanks and the throat is slightly greyish.

**Eastern Double-collared Sunbird** *Nectarinia mediocris mediocris.* Very similar to the last species, but it has a *slightly longer bill and tail.* The throat is slightly darker than that of the Northern Double-collared. Still, they are undoubtedly difficult to tell apart.

**Variable Sunbird** *Nectarinia venusta.* This widespread species is common up to quite high altitudes. Another small sunbird with a fairly short bill; best told by its rather uniform plumage, greyish above and pale yellowish-white below, without streaks.

**Tacazze Sunbird** *Nectarinia tacazze jacksoni.* A big, long-billed sunbird, rather dark in general appearance. Above it is dark olive, with a **dull whitish supercilium** outlining the blackish lores and dusky ear-coverts. The underparts are dull *greyish-olive* with the centre of belly pale yellow (it has much less yellow below than in other, similarly-sized species). The tail is blackish with a faint blue gloss, and the outer tail feathers are whitish.

**Bronze Sunbird** *Nectarinia kilimensis kilimensis.* Also big and chunky; brownish-olive above with a dark face mask and a *narrow* white line above and behind the eye. The underparts are *pale yellow with a few greyish-olive streaks*; the throat is paler and more greyish-white with some faint streaks. The outer tail feathers are tipped whitish. The call, a loud *chi-chu, wee... chi-chu, wee*, is distinctive.

**Golden-winged Sunbird** *Nectarinia reichenowi.* Big and bright; the yellowish underparts and the bright yellow edges to the wings and tail make this species unmistakable. Above olive, as are the belly and flanks.

Golden-winged Sunbird — *Dale Zimmerman*

**Malachite Sunbird** *Nectarinia famosa cupreonitens.* This one needs a careful look. A touch smaller and slenderer than the last three species, with slightly elongated central tail feathers, the best feature is the *yellowish* underparts, not streaked as in the Bronze but heavily mottled with olive-brown on the flanks, breast and throat. It has a yellowish moustachial streak, dark lores and ear coverts (but not blackish like those of the Bronze) and a

blackish tail *narrowly edged white*. Above, it is greyish-brown with a faint whitish supercilium.

**Scarlet-tufted Malachite Sunbird** *Nectarinia johnstoni johnstoni*. A sunbird you are only likely to find at very high altitudes. This one is big and dark: essentially an all-brown bird. It is light brown above and slightly ***paler brown below***, with pale edges to the throat feathers and faint whitish moustachial streaks. The tail is entirely blackish. Adult females have orange pectoral tufts, although these are not always easy to see.

**Olive Sunbird** *Nectarinia olivacea*. A long-billed species of dense forest undergrowth: easily recognised by its uniform olive-green plumage, slightly darker above than below. Females have yellow pectoral tufts in races east of the Rift Valley in Kenya, as do the males in all races. The song is distinctive, a pretty, rather hesitant series of melodious notes, *chip... chip... chip... chipchipchipchipchipchip.*

## Children's Section

Oh no! Another **BIRDWORD** from Kuria Ndung'u. See if **you** can find nineteen hidden bird names in the grid below. The names may be down, across or diagonal; forward or backward... I've circled "STINT' to get you started.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| O | C | A | T | H | W | H | Y | D | A | H | B |
| W | L | O | G | L | O | N | G | B | I | L | L |
| L | E | T | U | M | S | R | H | E | N | X | I |
| E | I | Q | W | C | R | E | P | E | I | Y | A |
| T | A | L | A | K | A | T | C | K | R | O | U |
| B | U | R | O | W | B | L | E | W | P | O | Q |
| P | C | O | X | A | I | S | K | R | T | E | N |
| R | R | Z | B | H | L | T | W | M | A | T | O |
| I | A | I | R | W | F | I | N | F | O | O | T |
| O | N | T | O | W | P | N | R | O | H | N | T |
| N | E | B | E | R | G | T | C | Q | P | X | U |
| D | U | N | L | I | N | A | Y | B | O | O | B |

Here is the solution to the BIRDWORD in the last issue (vol. 2, no. 2): APALIS, BATIS, CHAT, CROW, DOWITCHER, FINCH, GULL, HYLIA, IBIS, KNOT, LARK, MARTIN, NICATOR, OWL. PARROT and RAIL.

# Threatened Birds of Kenya

## 5. Abbott's Starling

Leon Bennun, P O Box 40658, Nairobi

Abbott's Starling, *Cinnyricinclus femoralis*, is... well, enigmatic. We seem to know almost nothing about it, except that it is confined to a few highland forests in Kenya and northern Tanzania. It is classified as threatened because of its rarity and its small, fragmented range, within which suitable habitat is still being degraded.

Abbott's Starling is one of a group of birds endemic to the highland forests and grasslands of central Kenya and (in some cases) northern Tanzania. (This group includes another forest starling, Kenrick's, whose range extends to the Eastern Arc forests in Tanzania). These highlands form one of the global Endemic Bird Areas identified in a recent study by BirdLife International. An Endemic Bird Area is a region with a number of 'restricted range' bird species confined to it, indicating its importance for biodiversity conservation. 'Restricted range' birds are those with small global ranges, in this case considered to be less than 50,000 km2.

Abbott's itself has been recorded from Mt Kenya, Mt Kilimanjaro, Mt Meru, the Ngurdoto Forest and forests on and around the Limuru Escarpment, including Gatamayu and Kieni. At Kieni there are observations almost the whole year round, but most commonly in June–July when many trees are in fruit; flocks of up to 40 have been seen at times. Elsewhere it has most often been observed on Mt. Kenya, mainly on the southern slopes around Embu. Records are sporadic, however, and it seems likely that the birds move widely (as do other starlings) in search of fruiting trees. This may explain an old record from the Chyulu Hills, where flocks of around a hundred birds were seen feeding on fruit during an expedition in the 1930s.

Abbott's is closely related to Sharpe's Starling, C. *sharpei*, and resembles it in appearance and behaviour. Both tend to perch high on dead trees, singly or in small groups. Both have a dark, metallic blue back and a pale eye (paler and yellower in Abbott's), but in Sharpe's the whole underside is white washed tawny, while Abbott's has the dark metallic blue extending onto the throat and upper chest, and the rest of the underparts white washed yellow. The two species can be seen together at Kieni and Gatamayu.

The biology of Abbott's Starling — where and when it breeds and moves in particular — is largely a mystery. Records of this species are thus especially valuable. If you see Abbott's Starling, please send in the observation, with as much detail as possible on behaviour, locality and habitat and (of course) a precise date. Your records could help plan the conservation of this threatened bird.

# Iccarus

Oscar Mann, P O Box 20360, Nairobi

It's over a year since Iccarus left and sometimes I miss him keenly.

He came into my care when a huge pine tree was felled near my house. I was drawn to him by the frantic swoops and cries of his parents. Investigating I found him cowering under a bush, hurt, frightened and disoriented. It seemed his nest had been in the top of that tree and both had been flung violently to the ground.

He was a young Pied Crow, about six inches tall. From the behaviour of the two older birds that were making such a fuss, it was evident that he must still be under their care. Finding him without any overt signs of injury I placed him in a high fork in a tree, where his parents could see him. They came very close, screaming and flapping at me. The larger one, which I assume was the father, broke off dry branches directly overhead and dropped these on me, whilst the other rattled its beak against a tree.They continued to make a huge fuss which escalated considerably with the arrival of several kites and a sparrowhawk investigating the commotion.

By the time darkness fell I had come to the conclusion that the small bird would not fly, that his parents would not stay with him overnight and that it was too dangerous to leave him out all alone. So I took him home making sure the adults saw where we went. I laid some old *kangas* and straw in a wooden box in my bedroom and placed him there, closing the lid to make him feel secure.

At six the next morning I was woken by a terrible racket right outside my bedroom window. It was the two adult crows vociferously demanding return of the hostage, snapping twigs and banging their beaks against the branches. I was happy to find the little one perky and inquisitive and he allowed himself to be picked up with little fuss. As soon as I brought him outside and held him up high, the adults became quiet and watched as I placed him again in the fork of the tree.

Immediately the onslaught of the kites began and soon there were perhaps a dozen of them and several sparrowhawks making me feel that he would probably not last long here. He still made absolutely no effort either to walk or fly but just stood blinking in the light. I took his night box, fixed it up in a loquat tree near my house and placed him in it. The parents did come near but by evening I had not seen any improvement in his condition and took him back inside. By now I was worrying about feeding him and realised that I must take a greater degree of responsibility. I tried boiled milk from a dropper, mashed banana, bread, carrot — things I'd seen crows eating or thought they would like — but I was surprised that he didn't seem to know what to do with them.

At this stage I began phoning people I thought would know what to do. I think it was John Karmali who advised that the very best thing would be for me to chew up worms into a nice pulp, but I took his alternative suggestion which was to mash hard-boiled egg and mince meat and force feed him. He was certainly a lot more interested in this kind of food and, if I managed to get it right down at the back of his throat, he would swallow it, but that wasn't easy to do.

By this time he wasn't nearly so docile and had begun taking walks around my room, soon discovering my cupboard, where he took up residence amongst my socks.

The next morning he was a lot perkier and I found him walking around under the bed. I decided to try and give him a flying lesson. When I held him near the windows he was definitely interested in the outside and looked like he might try to jump so I moved back a bit and the movement made him flap his wings a little for balance. So I began to gently waft him through the air whilst he sat on my hand and he responded with such vigorous flapping that he actually managed to take off, only to crash straight to the floor, inspiring me to name him Iccarus. After this I held on to his feet whilst he really did get a good work out with his wings. Before putting him outside I fed him again and was rewarded immensely when he climbed up my arm and gave a tremendous caw right in my ear.

Through the day his parents kept a constant vigil. Since Iccarus was only eating minuscule amounts of the meat I'd bought, I placed some on a stump where the parents could see it. Within moments one of them came down to take a close look whilst the other kept watch. After a few hungry gobbles he (it was the larger one) took some up to his mate and fed her, which I found really touching. Very shortly after he took some more and flew to where Iccarus sat in his box in the tree and fed him too. So simple!

After just a few days Iccarus was able to fly right across my living room without too much difficulty, though his landings were appalling, often ending in rather comic nose-dives and somersaults. He explored the house on foot and was amazingly inquisitive, getting into everything. He spent every day outside in the loquat tree and, as he grew stronger and more confident, was no longer content to stay in the box but would climb all over from branch to branch, still under the careful eyes of his parents.

After about a week I had fresh cause for concern as he tried to fly to neighbouring trees and I kept finding him on the ground again. At last he did manage to fly to another tree, but considerably lower down than where he had started. The next morning I couldn't see him but he answered my calls and his parents were still around. Later I discovered him in another tree lower down the valley. My garden is on the side of Spring Valley and slopes steeply down to the river at the bottom. Over the next few days he worked his way towards the river and it became obvious that on his flights he wasn't managing to rise up. Finally he reached the banana trees at the bottom and I thought I would have to mount another rescue operation. I decided to let him stay in the bananas over night, planning a retrieval in the morning. I thought that if I brought him back up to the top of the valley he would at least get some good flying practice and might learn to rise before reaching the bottom a second time.

Early the next morning I went down to the river and cawed as I'd learned from him but there was no answer. I searched but all I could find were some old feathers near where I'd seen him last. My heart ached and I feared the worst but hoped they weren't his. After all, they did seem a lot older than his would have been... and there weren't any other signs.

Climbing back up the valley, thinking what a bad father I had been, I suddenly heard his call directly above me. Looking up I saw him quite high flapping madly away across the valley with his parents a little distance behind. I watched, tears streaming down my face, as he made a rather clumsy landing in some big trees on the other side. Being a dad can be tough when it's time for the kids to move on.

I heard his cry a few more times over the next days — always able to recognise it from all the others — but then it stopped and I've not heard him again.

As I said, I sometimes still miss him keenly, hope he's well, and like to think that one day he may come and visit.

## Events and Announcements

Morning **Bird Walks** led by Fleur Ng'weno and Damaris Rotich continue every Wednesday. Meet at 8:45 am at the National Museums entrance for a walk in the Nairobi area. These walks are for EANHS members: non-members are welcome but requested to join the Society (see below).

Kenya Wetlands Working Group **Waterbird Count** at Lake Nakuru, 16–17 July 1994. Contact Oliver Nasirwa at the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya.

**'Birds of a Feather'**, an exhibition of bird art by Kenyan artists Kioko Mwitiki, Dinesh Rivankar and Steve Njenga. Karen Blixen Coffee Garden ('Charlie's'), Karen Rd., 15–24 July 1994.

**East Africa Natural History Society**. All birders in East Africa should join this Society, which offers lectures, excursions and publications with a strong bird focus. Sub-committees of the Society include the OS-c and BirdLife Kenya. The EANHS also organises ringing and nest record schemes in Eastern Africa. For membership details: tel. 742131/61, ext. 278, or write to the Hon. Secretary, EANHS, P O Box 44486 Nairobi. The office at the National Museums of Kenya is open each weekday morning (except Wednesday) and Wednesday afternoon.

*Scopus*, the lively regional journal of ornithology, is published three times a year by the OS-c and can be obtained from the OS-c Hon. Treasurer and Secretary Don Turner, P.O. Box 48019, Nairobi, Kenya (tel. Nairobi 48133). The annual subscription is KSh 250 (KSh 260 up-country); overseas rates available from Don Turner. Records are welcomed from the East African Bird Report which forms the third issue of *Scopus* each year.

**BirdLife Kenya** offers for sale notelets (showing attractive pen and ink drawings by Dale Zimmerman), postcards (showing the endemic birds of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest in a painting by Norman Arlott) and T-shirts (with a Crowned Eagle motif by Simon Thomsett). These are available from the Department of Ornithology and the EANHS office. The proceeds go to bird conservation projects.

**African Bird Club.** To join this new society, which produces an excellent colour Bulletin and aims to provide 'a worldwide focus for African ornithology', write to: African Bird Club, c/o BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Rd., Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK. Membership presently costs UK £12 per year.

The Malaysian Nature Society is organising the **Selangor International Bird Race 1994**, to be held in October to raise funds for the Kuala Selangor Nature Park. They invite teams from Kenya to take part. Anyone interested should write to: Malaysian Nature Society, P O Box 10750, 50724 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**Wanted!** The Department of Ornithology urgently needs one or more copies of Mackworth-Praed and Grant's two-volume *Handbook of Afican Birds (Series 1: East and North-eastern Africa)* for use in its field surveys. If anyone has these books for sale, please contact the Department.

**Contacts:** For queries concerning *Kenya Birds*, write to the Department of Ornithology, National Museums of Kenya, P O Box 40658, Nairobi, or telephone 742131/61, extension 243. For BirdLife Kenya, telephone Nairobi 749957; fax 741049.

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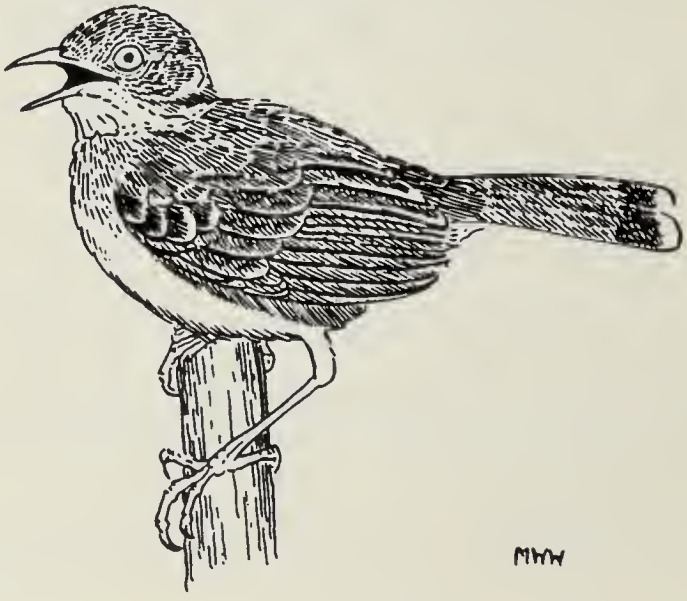


Singing Cisticola — *Martin Woodcock*